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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN REQUEST FOR A MEETING BY PRESIDENT YAR'ADUA WITH PRESIDENT BUSH ON THE MARGINS OF THE G-8

Classified by Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 15 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Nigeria's Ambassador to the U.S., George Obiozor and President Yar'Adua's Special Advisor Benjamin Ademola "Danny" Adebiyi meet with the Ambassador at their request on May 31. They asked that President Bush meet with President Yar'Adua, "if only for two minutes" on the margins of the June G-8. They also expressed concern that the fact that President Yar'Adua is a Muslim not be taken to mean that he would be accommodating of "radical Islam" and promised full, continued Nigerian support for the war on terror. The Ambassador took the opportunity to urge Nigeria to fulfill President Obasanjo's pledge to provide troops in Somalia and debt relief for Liberia. The meeting closed with Adebiyi hinting at a future accommodation between former Vice President Atiku and President Yar'Adua. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Obiozor asked the Ambassador to call on him at the Transcorp Hilton on May 31. When the Ambassador arrived, also present was Danny Adebiyi, Special Advisor to President Yar'Adua. Adebiyi, supported by Obiozor, asked for a meeting between President Bush and President Yar'Adua on the margins of the upcoming G-8. Such a meeting, "even if only for two minutes," would provide enormous encouragement for President Yar'Adua, the two said, as he embarks on reform of the election process, addresses deep seated issues in the Delta, sustains and expands the macro-economic program, and shoulders Nigeria's burden in Africa. They were at pains to emphasize that the fact that President Yar'Adua is a Muslim in no way implied that Nigeria would be stepping back from its commitment to the war on terrorism. They also made a plea that in public statements the U.S. remain sensitive that Islam, as a religion, is utterly opposed to terrorism.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador said he would relay the request for a meeting of the two Presidents at the G-8. He assured his interlocutors of U.S. sensitivity to any identification of Islam with international terrorism and sketched out our program of Muslim outreach in Nigeria. He praised President Yar'Adua's inaugural address and the promises of reform of the electoral process and his establishment of the Niger Delta as a first priority of his administration. He highlighted the importance of the U.S./Nigeria partnership on a host of African regional issues. The Ambassador took the opportunity to remind his interlocutors of President Obasanjo's commitment of Nigerian troops to Somalia, and urged that that commitment be fulfilled. He also noted the importance of debt relief for Liberia and reiterated our request for early Agreement for his successor. When the Ambassador raised the desirability of the President receiving Senator Nelson the following day, Adebiyi and Obiozor strongly agreed.

¶4. (C) Having delivered the message he had been charged with,

Adebiyi then commented on President Yar'Adua's working style. The President, he said, is reserved, enjoys privacy - "he spent four hours yesterday alone, reading" - and values punctuality. He is no extrovert and dislikes "spin." Adebiyi emphasized Yar'Adua's need for international encouragement "as he proceeds to do the right thing." He also raised the strong possibility of a reconciliation between former Vice President Atiku and the Presidency, "President Yar'Adua has no quarrel with Atiku."

¶5. (C) Comment: Adebiyi is a Harvard-trained economist. For years, he has been advisor to President Obasanjo and his predecessors as head of state. He is also personally close to Ibrahim Babangida. In his capacity as special advisor, his focus has been on economics, and he has been distant from more partisan Villa denizens such as the Uba brothers. He is the owner of a construction company, and his wife has a senior position at a Lagos bank. He is Christian, his wife Muslim. His has always been instinctively pro-American, and wants a close U.S./Nigeria bilateral relationship. His and Obiozor's alleged concern about the U.S. response to Yar'Adua's religious background may be a projection of Christian anxiety about a Muslim Chief of State. His claim to speak for President Yar'Adua is credible. Nevertheless, the power relationships around the president are still being sorted out.

CAMPBELL